

Me, myself and I

Gianluca Failla

HIV Prevention Coordinator at Spectra for GMI Partnership, Gianluca hails from Sicily, lives in Limehouse, follows the Queer Eye quintet on social media, and is planning a trip to Sydney.

Where are you from originally?

I am from Palermo, a beautiful town in the southern Italian island of Sicily. It's perfect for holidays, but now I call London home.

And where do you live now?

I live with my partner David in Limehouse; I love being a stone's throw from the Thames with fantastic running tracks along the river. I have a beautiful view of the city from my balcony, especially good for sunsets. It's just the two of us at the moment, but we love pets, and I have a feeling a French bulldog will be joining us soon.

What do you love about London and why?

I fell in love with this city the first time I visited it when I was 13 years old. I made the decision then that this was going to be the city to spend my life in. I love everything about London; it's multicultural, nonjudgemental, with great services and endless opportunities. I love the place.

What was the first gay venue you visited?

The first gay venue I visited in London was the Chariots sauna in Waterloo. I was 18, in London for holiday, and wouldn't have gone in any bars or other venues where people could have seen me. At that age, because of the culture in which I grew up, I was trying to hide my sexuality from the rest of the world. At that time I remember I loved it as a comfortable place where I didn't need hide my sexuality.

Can you describe briefly what GMI Partnership does?

GMI works across London to address the sexual health inequalities confronting diverse groups of men who have sex with (MSM), delivering the largest outreach and community-based HIV and STI testing programme for MSM. The GMI Partnership, established in 2008, just had its 10 years celebration and is a collaboration between, Spectra, Positive East and METRO Charity.

And what is your role there?

My role is HIV Prevention Coordinator. I find new venues willing to collaborate with us, recruit and manage our wonderful volunteers, offering testing to people wanting to access our service, or simply engaging in conversation about ways to prevent HIV. There are so many ways now, and I'm a fan of combined prevention!

What was the last theatre show

you saw, where, and what did you think of it?

The last theatre show I saw was in Berlin a couple of months ago. It was The Chemsex Monologues. I loved it. It gave me a clear insight about the chemsex scene – something we should talk more about because our community needs help, at least in finding the best harm reduction options.

What is your guilty pleasure and why?

My guilty pleasures are a good pizza and pasta, stereotypical for an Italian, I know. Currently I try to avoid carb-heavy food, but sometimes the Sicilian in me just takes over.

Biggest extravagance?

Let's just pick the most recent – visiting one of the world's top ten restaurants, Mugaritz, in San Sebastián, a couple of weeks ago. We enjoyed 25 different courses with 20 matched wines and rather a large hangover the next morning.

Best gift you've ever received and why?

It was my 33rd birthday and I was in Sicily to spend a week with my family. That morning the postman delivered a bottle of champagne for me, from a gorgeous Australian guy I had met three days earlier at Stansted Airport. I will never forget that, it was so romantic of David. I felt so special.

What has been the highlight of your career so far and why?

The highlights of my career so far has been my work with the London gay community. Recently during one of our testing sessions in Soho, I approached a guy in his 50s, outreaching him on Grindr. He initially declined to have an HIV test. He had never had one and was living in fear of being positive. It wasn't difficult to explain to him why it's actually important to know your status; nowadays with medication, the virus is completely manageable, and with U=U HIV can't be passed on either. He decided to have the test, and when he left, a huge weight had been lifted off his shoulders. He said he would look to access PrEP and also left with a clear understanding that 'Undetectable = Untransmittable'. This is a common scenario and the reason I do this job. Informing people and inspiring informed behaviour changes.

If you could go back in time which



Sydney



Queer Eye

year would you choose and why?

I always look at the present and the future, so this question is a bit hard to answer. I wouldn't mind going back to the day of my parents wedding as it looked beautiful.

What's the best party you've ever been to and what made it so good?

The best party was on a beach at night in August in Sicily. There were 30 of us, great music and a bonfire. What made it so good was the temperature, the sound of the sea, having the odd dip and being with friends. We stayed on the beach from 11pm until 8am, enjoying a great sunrise with espressos and croissants.

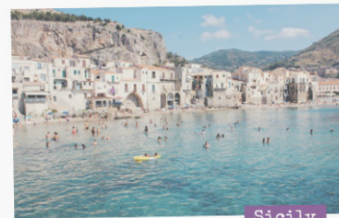
What is the best piece of advice you've been given?

A flatmate years ago wanted to show me a documentary, which has become my mantra. The advice is "Ask, believe, receive – and keep smiling!"

Who is your LGBT+ hero and why?

The team of volunteers and staff who I work with every day on HIV prevention all over London. Why? Because of the dedication that all the team has in promoting sexual health.

Who are the most entertaining people you follow on social media



Sicily

and why?

The fab five of Queer Eye; I love how they inspire and improve people's lives and I love their advice about health and style. And the GMI social channel, of course.

Where in the world would you like to visit before you die and why?

Hmm... how much space do you have in this magazine? I'm eternally curious, I love experiencing different cultures, cuisines, meeting people. I love travelling. High on my list at the moment is Sydney and I have just booked a flight.

What is one thing you wish you knew when you were younger?

It's your life, live as you want, and don't care about the expectations of others. Just care about following your dreams.

For more information about HIV prevention and support services in London, visit gmipartnership.org.uk

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